

Ballad of Casey Jones and Vocabulary

Section Objective:

- Reading skills: Monitor reading comprehension; evaluate an author's argument; and identify cause and effect
- Vocabulary: Analyze similes; understand synonyms and epithets; understand words from folktales; and understand idioms
- Literary skills: Understand the way a work of literature is related to its historical period



Casey Jones

Casey Jones is probably the most famous locomotive engineer heroes who have died at their post of duty.

Casey's formal name was John Luther (Casey) Jones. He married Miss Janie Brady who is living today in Jackson, Tennessee. They had two sons and a daughter.

He was a tall man – six feet, four and half inches, dark-haired, and gray-haired. He was known for his expertise in handling the locomotive whistle – kind of a trademark.

He worked for several years as freight and passenger engineer between Jackson and Water Valley. In 1900, Casey transferred to the Memphis-Canton (Mississippi) run as throttle-puller of the Illinois Central's crack "Cannonball" train.

The night Casey died he had volunteered to take a run for someone who was ill. Because of too many trains on the track and, perhaps, some mixed-up flag signals, Casey died at the throttle, trying to save the train and watching that no one gets hurt.

Wallace Sanders, a Negro engine wiper, wrote the poem / song about Casey in his own individual style because he admired Casey so much.



“Ballad of Casey Jones”

Cause and Effect

Because Casey Jones pulled into the station late (cause), he was there when they needed someone to substitute for a sick engineer (effect). Casey volunteered (effect). Since they were late getting started (cause), Casey was going fast (effect). Because of the moan of the whistle (cause), everyone knew that Casey was at the throttle (effect). With the speed (cause), they were only two minutes late (effect). They were going seventy miles an hour, when they saw a freight (cause). Casey told his fireman, Sim Webb, to jump to save himself while Casey tried to guide the train to safety, but died (effect).

Folklore

Although this a true incident, based on history, some of the language and praise might be exaggerated to make the point of how heroic this hero from Tennessee was.

Legend

Wallace Saunders made up the original song about Casey Jones’s death.

Legend says that Illinois Central Engineer William Leighton heard the song and shared it with his brothers who were Vaudeville performers.

They supposedly added a chorus and then took it on the road. Credit is given to Lawrence Seibert for the music, and Eddie Newton was given credit for the lyrics of the song. Vaudeville helped the legend live on. Over forty versions of the song have been published.

Neither did Casey’s family or Wallace Saunders earned any money from this song.

Vocabulary Practice

“Ballad of Casey Jones”

Directions: Choose folktale phrasing that seems fitting for “**Ballad of Casey Jones.**”

Sample: “Come all you rounders if you want to hear a story ‘bout a brave engineer.”

(Invites reader into the poem for a story – a ballad.)

Growth Activities

1. Research the real “Casey Jones.”